



## **Student Performance Q&A: 2010 AP® European History Free-Response Questions**

The following comments on the 2010 free-response questions for AP® European History were written by the Chief Reader, Jeffrey Hamilton of Baylor University in Waco, Texas. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

### **Question 1**

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

The purpose of the document-based question (DBQ) is to assess the degree to which students can analyze various types of historical documents in order to construct a meaningful analytical essay. This particular DBQ asked students to analyze factors leading to instability in the Weimar Republic from 1918 to 1933. Students were provided with 11 documents on which to base their responses. One of the documents was a political cartoon. Students' essays were evaluated on the extent to which they met the requirements specified in the core scoring guidelines. Students who exceeded these requirements could then earn additional points in the expanded core, which was based on holistic assessment.

#### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 4.06 out of a possible 9 points. Students found the task (to analyze factors) accessible, and for the most part they were able to articulate an explicit thesis that identified at least two specific factors drawn from the documents. While some students were confused by the number of political parties identified in the documents and found it challenging to execute the other tasks, many students produced competent or superior responses that included substantial outside information leading to more sophisticated analysis of the documents.

#### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Some students failed to provide an appropriate, explicitly stated thesis. In some cases students expressed the thesis in generic terms (e.g., "social and political," "for and against the Republic") rather than referring to specific factors (e.g., "Communist," "weak leadership," "Nazis") derived from an analysis of the documents.

Students who presented a clear and explicit thesis that identified three factors seldom failed to earn the core point for grouping. On the other hand, students who presented a generic thesis often

had difficulty generating groups in which the documents were sufficiently linked and interconnected.

Political party identifications occasionally presented problems. For example, the Goebbels document (Doc. 7) was sometimes misinterpreted as representing a Communist perspective. Alternatively, the National Socialist document (Doc. 11) was frequently misinterpreted as a Socialist view.

Many students, even those who presented a sophisticated essay, failed to develop point-of-view analysis. As a result, these students were not awarded the point-of-view core point, which held their score to 5 points.

With regard to the use of outside information, the topic (a question on the Weimar Republic) is so familiar that some students were led to write longer responses that dealt less with the documents than with other historical information.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Teachers should remember that the DBQ is a *skills-based* exercise. They should therefore provide solid instruction in developing the following skills, which will result in higher scores:

- Developing an acceptable thesis that directly addresses all parts of the question. In this question on the Weimar Republic, fewer students were tempted to generate a generic thesis (e.g., social, political and economic factors). Nonetheless, many had difficulty in constructing an adequate thesis based on a critical analysis of the documents.
- Grouping. Teachers should note that workable, meaningful grouping is driven by the development of a solid thesis. Students should analyze the documents to impose order on them, thereby creating acceptable groupings that respond to the prompt. Simply mixing documents in a paragraph without regard to whether or not they support the topic of the paragraph and are linked to each other (i.e., “laundry listing” documents) will fail to earn credit for the point involving the use of the documents to support the thesis.
- Identifying point-of-view analysis in ways that explain *why* the author or source of the document makes the claims stated. Students must move beyond a simple statement that an author has a bias. Even when evaluating the reliability of the source or when recognizing that different sources serve different purposes, the student must be thorough in explaining the author’s perspective or the document’s purpose.

## **Question 2**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This question required students to consider a relatively familiar issue in early modern Europe (c. 1500–c. 1800), the rise of the state and state power and, from the perspective of cultural and social history, the use of the arts and the sciences. The crucial issue was students’ ability to establish an explicit link between the enhancement of state power and the ways in which monarchs used the arts and the sciences to attain such an objective. All major textbooks dwell in some detail on the use of symbolic power, citing Louis XIV and the establishment of his court at Versailles as the embodiment of such authority. Some textbooks also provide information on the Escorial, the Schonbrunn and the Peterhof palaces. Major textbooks examine the commissioning of

works of art by the monarchs of Europe and their role as patrons of art at varying length, though the relationship between monarchs and the sciences is usually treated with less depth.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 2.50 out of a possible 9 points. Although major textbooks cover the topic (especially the linkage between the arts and the development of absolutism), students experienced considerable difficulty offering convincing linkage between the enhancement of state power and the use of the arts and the sciences by European monarchs to achieve such an objective. Students provided extensive factual evidence of state patronage of the arts but were often ineffective when they attempted to link such patronage to the development of state power.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Many students still provided a perfunctory thesis statement or merely a restatement of the question (“There were many ways ...”).

Establishing a link between the enhancement of state power and the ways in which European monarchs used the arts and sciences presented a formidable challenge for a significant number of students. Many students provided relevant evidence but were content with an assertion (such as “Louis XIV used the palace of Versailles to control his nobles”) that lacked analysis (in which they might have explained, for example, how Louis XIV used life at the Versailles court to assert his authority over other centers of power in France), or they simply identified actions by monarchs without an explicit attempt to deal with the issue of state power.

A number of essays were content to speak about the arts and the sciences in generic terms (“monarchs used portraits of themselves” or “kings liked new tools and weapons”) without providing any information that placed the response in the time period covered by the question.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Teachers whose students have limited experience with analytical essay writing might consider in-class exercises in which an entire class is asked to formulate a thesis statement for a particular question as part of a group exercise. The next exercise would require them to work in small groups and engage in peer review. Such efforts should be made before students are asked to write an essay on their own.

A similar approach may prove useful when teaching students the importance of defending assertions in an analytical essay. Many students were content to provide assertions that lacked substantive support. Asking groups of students what evidence could be used to defend a particular assertion might help them when they are asked to undertake such responsibilities individually.

Many students failed to read the question properly and simply regurgitated whatever information they remembered about a particular time period or era. Teachers need to break down questions into their component parts, possibly on a board; students can see how the instructor takes a question apart in order to understand it.

Understanding of the task (assess, analyze, compare and contrast, etc.) is vital for success. Teachers should provide students with the list of charges used in the AP European History Exam and require students to become familiar with the terminology and the tasks associated with each prompt.

### Question 3

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This question asked students to “analyze the various Protestant views of the relationship between church and state in the period circa 1500–1700.” Students were expected to include at least three different views to meet the criterion for “various.” Further, they were expected to address more than one geographic area in order to be fully responsive to the question.

#### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 3.53 out of a possible 9 points. Many students performed very well. They seemed to understand the charge of the question, and they were able to use specific evidence to support their assertions about church and state relationships. The question was straightforward, so well-prepared students were able to write effective responses that were appropriately organized, usually based on particular groups’ views. A significant number of students, however, failed to offer explicit and relevant thesis statements and/or provide specific supporting evidence. Thus, while many students were able to earn scores in the upper end of the score range, there were still a large number of weaker essays.

#### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Some students had difficulty developing a sufficiently analytical thesis. Simply naming groups involved in the Protestant Reformation was too formulaic to be considered analytical.

While the question was straightforward, a minority of students fundamentally misunderstood the prompt; students perceived “church” as the Catholic Church, which led them to write only about causes of the Reformation.

While the question specified a 200-year time period, most students focused only on the 16th century; for this particular essay, this was deemed acceptable since this approach represented the overwhelming majority of responses.

#### ***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Students must be able to write thesis statements that are explicit and fully responsive to the prompt. Simply restating the prompt or listing groups involved in the Protestant Reformation are types of responses that do not suggest analysis or provide direction for the essay.

It is also essential that students answer the question that is being posed. It was not uncommon for students to write primarily about the causes of the Protestant Reformation, without addressing relationships between church and state.

### Question 4

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This question asked students to perform two tasks: describe at least some components of the Atlantic trade in the period circa 1450–1700, and analyze the impact of that trade on the economy of Western Europe during that period.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 3.73 out of a possible 9 points. Most students could list some components of the Atlantic trade and describe, at least minimally, the impact of the Atlantic trade on the Western European economy. The vast majority of students knew at least that Spain's imports of gold and silver caused it first to prosper and then to decline when the influx of coins was poorly managed.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Students sometimes struggled to analyze rather than describe, and they could not always link the trade to the economy.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Encourage students to analyze rather than describe. This question required students to take information from different parts of a textbook, so students should be taught to link different effects, even if the textbook treats them in separate chapters or sections.

**Question 5**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This question asked students to compare and contrast the attempts of two of three states (Austria-Hungary, Russia, Ottoman Empire) to hold together their empires in the period circa 1850 to 1914. Students were expected to identify problems common to those states and compare and contrast the attempts made to maintain imperial power. The intent was not only to assess students' knowledge of late-19th- to early-20th-century history, but also to encourage attention to Eastern Europe.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 2.75 out a possible 9 points.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Some students focused more on problems faced by the empires (e.g, nationalism, ethnic diversity, lack of industrialization) than on actual attempts to address those problems. This was a particular issue with discussions of the Ottoman Empire.

Many essays dealt with the instability within the empire(s) and neglected to properly address attempts made to hold them together. In fact, most students addressed Russia and Austria-Hungary and avoided the Ottoman Empire altogether. In some respects, this was the "emancipation of the serfs/dual monarchy" question, but most essays offered more information and addressed the time span.

Other students concentrated their attention on the World War I period, which severely limited not only the scope of information, but those students' ability to answer the question effectively. Essays that began with the Revolution of 1905 or the Bosnian Crisis of 1908 had less room to maneuver and fewer opportunities to explore attempts at holding together the empire(s). They were generally weaker than their counterparts that covered a greater expanse of the 1850–1914 time span.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Good writing is essential to success on any essay assignment. Teachers should demand explicit thesis statements, even if students only manage to write them at the end of the essay. Many fine treatments of this question began with very weak or inadequate thesis statements (e.g., “they attempted to hold together their empires in similar and different ways”) that detracted from the eventual score. An articulate and well-expressed thesis can help raise an average essay’s score because it can demonstrate thoughtful development and sophistication.

Free-response questions in the last two AP European History Exams have shown a sustained interest in measuring students’ competency in Eastern European history, but the treatment of Central and Eastern Europe is rather uneven among the common textbooks. Some provide greater emphasis and detail than others, and teachers may need to supplement the readings. Increased focus on and teaching time in this area will only assist students when they face questions about this region.

## **Question 6**

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

The intent of this question was to assess students’ ability to discuss the goals and achievements of the “first-wave” feminist movement (c. 1850–1920) and compare them with those of the “second-wave/third-wave” feminist movement (1945 to the present). The question required students to supply information about feminist goals and achievements (usually legal, political and educational rights in the first period and cultural, professional or reproductive rights in the second period). The question supplied specific time periods, helping students to organize their responses and providing a basis for a thesis about the similarities and differences between the two movements.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 2.96 out of a possible 9 points. Students seemed to understand the periodization and the idea that there were two distinctive feminist movements. However, they often wrote generically about the question and failed to provide much specific evidence, and some failed even to link it clearly to Europe. That said, there were some really wonderful essays that clearly earned a score of 9. Students were able to show a deep knowledge of the struggle for suffrage (mostly in Great Britain) and the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir. Some students had solid information and analysis for this question, while others were simply picking something they could write about based on their common knowledge.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Overall the periodization was clear, and students did not make major gaffes with this question for the most part. The advancement of individuals like Margaret Thatcher to leadership positions was a major point that many students mentioned.

One common error was writing an essay that did not specifically make a connection to Europe. The question can be answered generically, or as a U.S. history question, and the information concerning both feminist movements is the same in the broad strokes and outlines. This is not a history taught in a highly detailed way.

Many students were aware that women did not have the vote in the first period and that women's suffrage was one of the main demands of the early feminist movement. For the second period, students could discuss reproductive rights or legal issues such as gender discrimination in the workplace. Students tended to talk quite a bit about working outside the home as a fundamental right, as well as equal pay for equal work. All this was acceptable, but there did need to be some nuance in the discussion.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Emphasize that a specific historical and geographic context needs to be made clear in each essay. This was done easily for this question if a student wrote, for example, “Margaret Thatcher became the first female prime minister of Great Britain.” Or, “women in France lobbied for abortion rights.”

Gender history is an important topic throughout the course, and teachers should work to include it wherever they can, from the Renaissance to the contemporary period. The textbooks have greatly improved their treatment of second-wave feminism since 1996, when there was a similar question on the exam. If teachers are able to get more recent textbooks and use them, this is just the kind of material that can be taught effectively.

## **Question 7**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This question asked students to “analyze the ways in which the theories of both Darwin and Freud challenged traditional European ways of thinking about religion, morality, and human behavior in the period circa 1850–1950.” Students were expected to address a broad range of challenges to traditional ways of thinking. Although there was some leeway in the question with regard to interpreting what is meant by religion, morality, and human behavior, there was clearly an expectation that these issues would be addressed in some manner. The question clearly called for analysis, and essays that simply provided descriptions of the ideas of Darwin and Freud were insufficient. The question was broad enough in focus to allow for students to discuss Darwin's challenges to religious worldviews of creation, Social Darwinism, the rise of Freudian thought and psychoanalysis, and the consequences of Darwin's and Freud's ideas for a range of different cultural forms (including, in relation to Freud, surrealist art and modernist literature).

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 4.37 out of a possible 9 points. Students performed well, partly as a result of their ability to formulate relevant theses and partly because of their attempts to address the theories of Darwin and Freud with a fair degree of specificity.

Despite the relatively effective way in which many students answered this question, responses did vary widely. Many students found some difficulty with the analysis part of the prompt and did not provide explicit discussions of how traditional views (particularly with regard to religion, morality, and human behavior) were challenged in a variety of ways. Many students could identify one or two specific challenges, but moving beyond that number proved to be more difficult and was one of the indicators that differentiated stronger essays from medium-range essays.

Stronger essays generally provided a broad range of specific and detailed evidence, frequently relating Darwin's ideas to Social Darwinism and illustrating how Freud's notions affected understandings of gender, artistic movements, or interpretations of war in the 20th century. Even

some of the weaker responses could identify the ways in which Darwin's and Freud's ideas challenged traditional Judeo-Christian views of creation and morality. Weaker essays often described the theories of Darwin and Freud with little or no analysis of the ways in which they challenged traditional views of religion, morality, and human behavior. Weaker essays also tended to contain major interpretive errors, vague assertions and often generalized evidence.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

While errors of fact (attributing Nietzsche's ideas to Freud or indicating that Charles Darwin was the "inventor" of Social Darwinism) and errors of interpretation or chronology (asserting that Darwin was a complete atheist or that both authors affected the French Revolution and the Revolutions of 1848) did appear in these essays, many of the problems with weaker responses tended to relate to omissions. Many students, for example, only managed to discuss two challenges to traditional ways of thinking and frequently addressed Darwin and Freud unevenly. Similarly, there were many essays in which the analysis of how traditional ways of thinking were challenged was decidedly weak or underdeveloped.

A number of students had difficulty moving beyond simple descriptions of the ideas of Darwin and Freud and, thus, largely neglected the analytical directive in the question. Similarly, weaker essays had difficulty with constructing theses that moved beyond a mere paraphrase or restatement of this prompt.

Finally, students displayed a tendency to conflate the three categories of thought identified in the prompt (religion, morality, and human behavior).

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Remind students to pay careful attention to what the prompt is asking of them. When considering why the word "analyze" might appear at the beginning of the prompt, it is imperative that they think carefully about (and present to their reader in as detailed a way as possible) the overview of their argument and the way they intend to use historical evidence in crafting that argument.

Students also need to be reminded that a thesis statement (whether it appears in the introduction or the conclusion of the essay) must make every effort to address the various components of any given prompt. Students should also be instructed that, when possible, the body of the essay needs to refer back to the main interpretive strands that were outlined in the introduction.

Encourage students to think carefully about the types of evidence they attempt to incorporate into their responses. In most instances generalizations will not suffice to substantiate major arguments. To rectify this problem, students need to gain more practice in backing up their claims with specific details.

Finally, encourage students to think more about how they analyze why certain developments occurred or what impact key individuals had in European history. The need for analytical thinking and the ability to think and write about causality and the impact of ideas, processes and events must be emphasized in classes to help students meet the challenges that they are likely to face in the exam.